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□ The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) mourns the shocking death of Oswaldo Paya, a longtime human rights advocate in Cuba, who was killed on Sunday in an automobile accident.

“Oswaldo Paya was a committed, courageous champion for peaceful, democratic change and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom, for all Cubans,” said USCIRF Chair Katrina Lantos Swett. “Through the Varela Project, the Christian Liberation Movement, and other forms of activism, Paya spoke truth to power, holding accountable the abusers of freedom and dignity. My USCIRF colleagues and I offer our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and co-laborers in the battle for Cuba’s future. Given questions surrounding the circumstances of his death, we urge that a full and transparent investigation be conducted.”

For decades, Paya spoke out against the repressive practices of the Castro regime. As USCIRF documented in its 2012 Annual Report, Cuba remains on its Watch List due to its continued detention, arrests, and harassment of religious leaders, control and monitoring of religious belief and practices through surveillance and legal restrictions, and invasive registration process for religious organizations.

“In the wake of Paya’s death, and given its worsening economic and social problems, now is the time for Cuba to take real steps toward a brighter future by upholding freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief,” said Chairwoman Swett. “As countless countries can attest, freedom opens the door to prosperity and stability.”

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Samantha Schnitzer at [Sschnitzer@uscirf.gov](mailto:Sschnitzer@uscirf.gov). This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it or 202-786-0613.